

Josephus

Nazret Berhane

Flavius Josephus, whose original name was Joseph Ben Matthias, was born in 37 CE. He was born and raised in Jerusalem, where his father, named Matthias, was a first-century CE Jewish priest, and his mother, who remains unnamed in his autobiography was a noblewoman, who came from the Hasmonean bloodline. Growing up in a Jewish household, he soon later became known to be the commander of the Jewish rebel forces during the Great Revolt against Rome, between 66-70 CE. After Josephus was captured by the Roman forces, he prophesied to the Roman commander Vespasian, that he would be the next emperor of Rome. It wasn't until 68 CE where the prophecy Josephus made came true, and Vespasian became emperor. After Vespasian had released him, Josephus served as the translator and advisor of the Roman forces until the fall of Jerusalem in 70 CE. After serving in the Judean war, alongside Vespasian's eldest son, Titus, and his successor, he arrived in Rome and wrote four significant compositions that have survived to this day.

These four compositions, in chronological order, are Jewish War, Jewish Antiquities, the Life of Josephus, and Against Apion.

In the first composition, Jewish War, which was completed before the year 79 CE, Josephus talks about detailed events of the war between 66 and 74 CE and incorporates events of Jewish history from Antiochus Epiphanes until much after the Great revolt. Josephus wanted to end the dispute between both the Jewish and Roman communities regarding the start and aftermath of the Great Revolt, as it was only getting worse. Because of the vindication of the Judean God, Josephus emphasizes, both communities have to learn how to coexist.

In this second composition, Jewish Antiquities, which was completed in 93/94 CE, is divided into two halves. In the first half, Josephus used the Hebrew Bible, the Septuagint, and Aramaic translations to paraphrase the Torah and the historical books. He also used those texts to summarize some of the prophetic books of the Bible. And in the second half, Josephus expands upon his writing (of the) Jewish War to narrate the events of Jewish history from the late Persian period to the First Revolt. He continues to also talk about the Temple and its significant importance to the Jewish people. His overall purpose of writing this composition was to emphasize granted prosperity when the people follow Moses's laws, and why Moses's laws are not only subjected to Jews but Gentiles as well.

In the third composition, the Life of Josephus, Josephus gives detailed accounts of his experience being the commander of the rebel forces during the Great Revolt, from 66-67

CE. He also briefly talks about his background and early events that had occurred in his life.

In the fourth composition, *Against Apion*, which is an apologetic work or tractate, Josephus defends the Jewish people after anti-Semitic remarks were made by Hellenistic writers.

And after spending the last 30 years of his life writing these compositions, he died in 100 CE.

Josephus is important for the study of ancient Judaism because he provides us with the only chronological account of Jewish history from Alexander the Great to the end of the First Jewish Revolt. His extensive corpus gives a detailed account of the main processes in the development of ancient Judaism.

Josephus is important to the study of Matthew because he provides us with insight and background of notable characters and institutions during this age. The Jewish religious sects of the Pharisees, Sadducees, and the Essenes, the Hasmoneans, Herod the Great, and his family, Roman emperors such as Caesar Augustus, etc. are all examples included and discussed in the New Testament. He even speaks about Jesus Christ, John the Baptist, and James, the brother of Jesus, which guide us in learning the extent of how they influenced the many events that occurred in the New Testament. Overall, without Josephus's writings, where he recounted the lives of all these people, we would lack an in-depth understanding of the political and spiritual climate in Israel during the New Testament age.

Works Cited:

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